

What Is Claimed Is:

1 1. A method for managing a database system, comprising:
2 receiving a command to perform an administrative function involving an
3 object defined within the database system;
4 determining if the object is a sensitive object that is associated with
5 security functions in the database system;
6 if the object is not a sensitive object, and if the command is received from
7 a normal database administrator for the database system, allowing the
8 administrative function to proceed; and
9 if the object is a sensitive object, and if the command is received from a
10 normal system administrator, disallowing the administrative function.

1 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 receiving a request to perform an operation on a data item in the database
3 system;
4 if the data item is a sensitive data item containing sensitive information
5 and if the request is received from a sensitive user who is empowered to access
6 sensitive data, allowing the operation to proceed if the sensitive user has access
7 rights to the data item; and
8 if the data item is a sensitive data item and the request is received from a
9 normal user, disallowing the operation.

1 3. The method of claim 2, wherein if the data item is a sensitive data
2 item, if the operation is allowed to proceed, and if the operation involves retrieval
3 of the data item, the method further comprises decrypting the data item using an
4 encryption key after the data item is retrieved.

1 4. The method of claim 3, wherein the encryption key is stored along
2 with a table containing the data item.

1 5. The method of claim 4, wherein the encryption key is stored in
2 encrypted form.

1 6. The method of claim 1, wherein the sensitive object can include
2 one of:

3 a sensitive table containing sensitive data in the database system;
4 a sensitive row within a table in the database system, wherein the sensitive
5 row contains sensitive data; and
6 an object that represents a sensitive user of the database system who is
7 empowered to access sensitive data.

1 7. The method of claim 1, wherein if the object is not a sensitive
2 object, and if the command to perform the administrative function is received
3 from a security officer, the method further comprises allowing the security officer
4 to perform the administrative function on the object.

1 8. The method of claim 1,
2 wherein the database system includes a number of sensitive data items;
3 and
4 wherein only specific sensitive users are allowed to access a given
5 sensitive data item.

1 9. A computer-readable storage medium storing instructions that
2 when executed by a computer cause the computer to perform a method for
3 managing a database system, the method comprising:
4 receiving a command to perform an administrative function involving an
5 object defined within the database system;
6 determining if the object is a sensitive object that is associated with
7 security functions in the database system;
8 if the object is not a sensitive object, and if the command is received from
9 a normal database administrator for the database system, allowing the
10 administrative function to proceed; and
11 if the object is a sensitive object, and if the command is received from a
12 normal system administrator, disallowing the administrative function.

1 10. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 9, wherein the
2 method further comprises:
3 receiving a request to perform an operation on a data item in the database
4 system;
5 if the data item is a sensitive data item containing sensitive information
6 and if the request is received from a sensitive user who is empowered to access
7 sensitive data, allowing the operation to proceed if the sensitive user has access
8 rights to the data item; and
9 if the data item is a sensitive data item and the request is received from a
10 normal user, disallowing the operation.

1 11. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 10, wherein if the
2 data item is a sensitive data item, if the operation is allowed to proceed, and if the

3 operation involves retrieval of the data item, the method further comprises
4 decrypting the data item using an encryption key after the data item is retrieved.

1 12. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 11, wherein the
2 encryption key is stored along with a table containing the data item.

1 13. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 12, wherein the
2 encryption key is stored in encrypted form.

1 14. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 9, wherein the
2 sensitive object can include one of:

3 a sensitive table containing sensitive data in the database system;
4 a sensitive row within a table in the database system, wherein the sensitive
5 row contains sensitive data; and
6 an object that represents a sensitive user of the database system who is
7 empowered to access sensitive data.

1 15. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 9, wherein if the
2 object is not a sensitive object, and if the command to perform the administrative
3 function is received from a security officer, the method further comprises allowing
4 the security officer to perform the administrative function.

1 16. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 9,
2 wherein the database system includes a number of sensitive data items;
3 and
4 wherein only specific sensitive users are allowed to access a given
5 sensitive data item.

1 17. An apparatus for managing a database system, comprising:
2 a command receiving mechanism that is configured to receive a command
3 to perform an administrative function involving an object defined within the
4 database system;
5 an execution mechanism that is configured to,
6 determine if the object is a sensitive object that is
7 associated with security functions in the database system,
8 allow the administrative function to proceed, if the object is
9 not a sensitive object, and if the command is received from a
10 normal database administrator for the database system, and to
11 disallow the administrative function, if the object is a
12 sensitive object, and if the command is received from a normal
13 system administrator.

1 18. The apparatus of claim 17,
2 wherein the command receiving mechanism is configured to receive a
3 request to perform an operation on a data item in the database system;
4 wherein the execution mechanism is configured to,
5 allow the operation to proceed, if the data item is a
6 sensitive data item, if the request is received from a sensitive user
7 who is empowered to access sensitive data, and if the sensitive user
8 has access rights to the data item, and to
9 disallow the operation, if the data item is a sensitive data
10 item, and if the request is received from a normal user.

1 19. The apparatus of claim 18, further comprising a decryption
2 mechanism, wherein if the data item is a sensitive data item, if the operation is
3 allowed to proceed, and if the operation involves retrieval of the data item, the
4 decryption mechanism is configured to decrypt the data item using an encryption
5 key after the data item is retrieved

1 20. The apparatus of claim 19, wherein the encryption key is stored
2 along with a table containing the data item.

1 21. The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the encryption key is stored in
2 encrypted form.

1 22. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein the sensitive object can include
2 one of:
3 a sensitive table containing sensitive data in the database system;
4 a sensitive row within a table in the database system, wherein the sensitive
5 row contains sensitive data; and
6 an object that represents a sensitive user of the database system who is
7 empowered to access sensitive data.

1 23. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein if the object is not a sensitive
2 object, and if the command to perform the administrative function is received
3 from a security officer, the execution mechanism is configured to allow the
4 security officer to perform the administrative function.

1 24. The apparatus of claim 17,

- 1 wherein the database system includes a number of sensitive data items;
- 2 and
- 3 wherein only specific sensitive users are allowed to access a given
- 4 sensitive data item.